Camping with Bigfoot: Sasquatch and the Varieties of Middle-Class Resistance to Consumer Culture in Late Twentieth-Century North America

JOSHUA BLU BUHS

On 3 November 1972, the legendary monster Sasquatch appeared in a large room above the parish hall of St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery, on 10th Street and Second Avenue in New York City. The room was the Theatre Genesis, one of the key locations in the so-called Off-Off-Broadway scene, and it was where Ronald Tavel's play *Bigfoot* was being performed. The Theatre Genesis was about as far away from the traditional home of Bigfoot—in terms of miles and cultural distance—as possible: the Manhattan theater catered to a middle-class audience, staging experimental, self-conscious plays that often celebrated homosexuality. By contrast, Bigfoot had entered the American cultural landscape in the late 1950s when Jerry Crew, a northern California construction worker, reported finding large footprints encircling his bulldozer. The creature became the star of tabloids, men's adventure magazines, cheap paperbacks, and B-movies. These amusements were pitched at white working-class men—blue-collar and lower white-collar workers with limited educations who, while sometimes paid well, labored at jobs in which they were heavily supervised—and offered predictable tales that glorified strong, free men who overcame evil and the odds through dint of hard work and skill (Parfrey 5–10; Fussell 43).

Bigfoot's appearance in an Off-Off-Broadway playhouse was more than idiosyncratic; it was the beginning of the creature's bourgeois career. Sporadically in the 1970s and more definitively in the 1980s,

The Journal of Popular Culture, Vol. 46, No. 1, 2013
© 2013, Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Bigfoot—while still appearing in working-class amusements—joined the middle class. *Harper's* and *The New Yorker* published stories about the monster; *Newsweek* and *Science Digest* ran sympathetic reports on Bigfoot hunters. Sasquatch appeared in *New York Times*-approved literature: Francine Prose's *Bigfoot Dreams*, Edward Hoagland's *Seven Rivers West*. In 1987, the creature starred in the distinctly middle-brow movie *Harry and the Hendersons*. The film made $4 million its opening weekend and spawned a TV show that aired 72 episodes over two years ("Weekend Box Office" 2; Morton 327–31). Bigfoot entered those hallowed middle-class preserves, the theater and art galleries. It appeared in poems.

These middle-class places weren't completely alien territory for Bigfoot, though, for they did share at least one characteristic with the working-class amusements that Bigfoot inhabited throughout the 1970s: both were sites where people critiqued, and tried to resist, mass culture and consumerism. "In the aftermath of World War II, a fundamental shift in America's economy, politics, and culture took place," wrote historian Lizabeth Cohen, and much of this change can be attributed to the transition from an industrial economy to a service one, from a society oriented around mass production in factories to one organized around mass consumption at shopping malls (8). This fundamental shift altered what it meant to be a citizen, to be a man, to be a woman. Identity came to be associated with what one bought rather than what one did (Susman 273–74; Pendergast 8–13, 209). Generally speaking, white working-class men were leery of this transformation. They valued themselves for their skills, their pragmatism, their ability to do things with their hands—"More than sexuality," wrote historian Joshua Freeman, "craft, strength, and the ability to endure made a man a man"—but the economy increasingly did not prize those qualities (725). Sociologist Lillian Rubin noted that white working-class men thought that "without notice, the rules of the game have been changed; what worked for their fathers no longer works for them. They only know that there are a whole new set of expectations—in the kitchen, in the parlor, in the bedroom—that leave them feeling bewildered and threatened" (120). The working-class entertainments where Bigfoot appeared presented themselves as standing against these cultural trends, giving due honor to skill and courage and character (E. A. Smith 64–68; Bird 67–70).

Theatre Genesis was also imagined as a place that was an antidote to consumerism. Ralph Cook, who founded the theater, said that he did so

"out of the necessity to survive": "personally, I have little hope for the survival of our civilization. But whatever hope we have lies with our artists. For they alone have the ability… to withstand the onslaught of the mass media and the multitude of false gods" (qtd. in Bottoms 105). As far from the rainy north woods as Theatre Genesis was, that room above a parish hall would have looked familiar to Bigfoot. And what was true of Theatre Genesis was true for the other middle-class entertainments where Bigfoot roamed. Middle-class fretting about consumerism, though, was different than the worrying of the working class. The working class saw these cultural trends as an encroachment on their historical privileges, an attack on themselves and on their morals: although their paychecks were small, their character proved their dignity and worth (Lamont 17–51). The middle class, by contrast, largely accepted—even fostered—consumerism and its attendant changes in society. Compared to the working class, middle-class Americans were well educated, affluent, and autonomous. Their relatively large paychecks proved that society valued them highly and allowed them to create personalities—buy things—that were consistent with their own self-image (Pendergast 1–13). Middle-class critiques of consumer culture, then, came not from outside but from inside that culture. The question was not (necessarily) how to oppose consumerism, but how to live with it (Horowitz 249–50).

Bigfoot became associated with three middle-class responses to consumerism. The beast was, alternately, a guide for middle-class Americans looking for transcendence amid the tackiness of a plastic society—for those hoping to catch hold of numinous strands winding through the mundane; a guide for those who wanted to escape the tyrannies of consumerism; and a guide for those who wanted only to retreat, to carve a space where their authentic selves could breathe. Bigfoot existed on the borderlands between American society and someplace else, and many middle class Americans hoped that they could follow the creature to that other place, that not-here. In the end, however, Sasquatch led them only back into consumer culture.

Camping with Bigfoot

Tavel's *Bigfoot*—and many of the other plays performed on Off-Off-Broadway stages—exemplified the first way of confronting

consumerism, an approach that came to be known as camp. Camp comes from the French word *camper*, meaning to pose, and camping had a long association with a self-conscious homosexual community that used it to attack and dissolve traditional notions of gender (Meyer 1). Members of the community dressed in drag and acted outrageously to demonstrate that life was performance, that there were no innate gender characteristics or sexual proclivities, only the various roles each person must perform. It was a form of protest, a reach for liberty, a demand for equality. Camp valued artifice, the contrived, and so even as it was a political statement, it was also an aesthetic sensibility. "Camp," wrote essayist Susan Sontag in her 1965 delineation of the subject, "is a certain mode of aestheticism. It is one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. That way, the way of Camp, is not in terms of beauty, but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylization" (277).

As an expression of taste, camp protected middle-class privilege—a means of survival, just as Cook wanted. Camp cognoscenti could survey the mass culture around them, and they could find those things that were most wonderful, most lurid and artificial, and cherish them, celebrate them. Working-class amusements were especially ripe for transformation into camp objects: *The National Enquirer*, comics, and men's magazines all became celebrated by the middle-class cognoscenti as camp (Ross 139). Tavel found inspiration in, among other things, old adventure movies. His play *Gorilla Queen*, for example, revealed—and reveled in—the campiness of *King Kong*, telling the story of Queen Kong, an ape played as an effeminate man, who is shot by a hunter, resurrected as a white woman—played by a man in drag—raped by its own corpse, transformed into the hunter—now half-an-ape himself—and married to the white woman. Tavel's plays, in the words of critic Bonnie Marranca, "undercut all literary, political, psychological, cultural, and sexual categories" (Marranca and Dasgupta xv). His interest was artistic, aesthetic: to demonstrate the superiority of his taste and, by extension, the taste of those who patronized his shows. "Camp," wrote Sontag, "is the answer to the problem: how to be a dandy in the age of mass culture" (288).

Bigfoot, the play, represented something of a break in Tavel's *oeuvre*. It was a tragedy, not a comedy, and less anarchic than plays such as *Gorilla Queen*. The dialog was dense, the set huge, requiring a monastery, a forest, a throne, and Jacob's ladder (Marranca and

Dasgupta 32–33). (The play could only be performed at Theatre Genesis by arranging the stage at a diagonal from the audience [M. T. Smith].) Still, the show was preoccupied with identity and the way that it could be constructed from the effluvia of mass culture. *Bigfoot* began with Jack O'Mahr, the lead, stepping out of character and announcing to the audience that he was taking his prerogative as an actor to change the show. He wanted to "introduce you to the existence of certain creatures, certain rare beings whose existence it is middle class to discount": Sasquatches (Tavel 4). The play was about twins—one of Tavel's obsessions—and, Jack explained, he brought in Bigfoot to "get straight to the problem and crack it for [Tavel] once and for all" (37). Borrowing a bit of Biblical exegesis from a popular book on Bigfoot by the naturalist Ivan Sanderson—a frequent writer for men's adventure magazines—Jack argued that Esau, brother of Jacob, was actually a Sasquatch: that Bigfoot is humankind's brother, and that humanity's relationship to Sasquatches paralleled the incestuous, ambivalent, love-hate relationship of all brothers, of all twins, of Jacob and Esau, of Tavel himself and his twin, Harvey, who appeared on the stage at play's end (Sanderson 378–82).

This was a quintessential moment of camp. Sanderson had presented his theory as "straight history" (383). For him, it was more evidence that Sasquatches existed. Tavel took the idea—without credit—and used it to explore how identities were made, how they were—literally—performed. The director, Michael Townsend Smith, worked to bring out this camp aesthetic, struggling to keep the play from "becoming too real" (M. T. Smith). He didn't understand the play—didn't even realize that the Sasquatches in it were real, not imaginary, until a week before opening night—and was working through his own sexual ambiguity, needing to "come out into heterosexuality," which he thought made it difficult for him to turn the play away from intense realism and toward something that was "magical, not cartoony. Beautiful. Not mockery." In the end, Smith paid less attention to content, and more to "structure," thinking that "the brother hang-up" was "just a pretext for art." Everything was just a pretext for art. It was the surface that mattered, the appearance—and the worthy were those who recognized it, who floated above mass culture, sorting it according to the excellence of their discrimination.

Bigfoot won an honorable mention in the *Village Voice*'s Obie (Off-Broadway) Awards, but its influence was minimal ("The Hot I

Baltimore" 36:5). The play was too ponderous, too big, too idiosyncratic to be staged very often. (Harvey Tavel could hardly be expected at every performance.) The camp sentiment showcased in *Bigfoot*, however, proved enduring. Escaping the confines of its home in a flamboyantly gay urban enclave, camp gave middle-class Americans a way to preserve their status. Consumerism made everything a mish-mash; camp separated it again, along different lines, ones marked out by middle-class intelligentsia, middle-class tastes. And so college kids collected tabloid stories of Bigfoot's exploits—"Bigfoot Ate my Baby," "I Married Bigfoot," "I Had Bigfoot's Baby"—and tacked them to their dormitory walls (Sloan 172–91), evidence of their camp tastes. Bigfoot movies from the 1970s became objects of cultish devotion, so bad that they were good, as the camp sensibility had it, their content ridiculous, but the style, the artifice engaging for cliquish fans. Bigfoot was both mocked and adored—that traditional camp mixture—in bizarre "Far Side" cartoons (Larson 30). The television show "The Simpsons" aired a campy take on the Sasquatch legend (John J. O'Connor C18). Even "Harry and the Hendersons" had a moment of camp. In one scene, the Hendersons set about cleaning the stinking beast to transform him into a drag queen, giving him a manicure, putting his fur in curlers.

Camp images of Bigfoot continued into the next century. In the summer of 2005, at the Paul Petro Contemporary Gallery, the Canadian artist Allyson Mitchell held a show called "Lady Sasquatch," featuring a number of Bigfoot-themed works. The wild woman images of "Lady Sasquatch" were a self-conscious response to erotic images of women in consumer society. When Mitchell was a teenager, she happened upon the racy comics in *The Playboy Golden Anthology of Cartoons*. "They were the first sexually explicit pictures that I can remember and they colonized my sexual imagination, providing a kind of blueprint for my erotic tastes," she remembered (qtd. in Reckitt 15). For her show at Paul Petro, Mitchell "reverse airbrushed" these images, using the cartoons as a foundation and building on top of the hairless human bodies buxom Sasquatches made of fake fur. The works were an attempt to offer a different standard of beauty. Mitchell wanted viewers to think, "Oh my god, I want to fuck a Sasquatch" (Temple). Her goal—like Tavel's long before—was to question the categories by which people thought about the world, to undermine them and create a space for new ways of thinking and acting.

The Green Man

Bigfoot offered middle-class Americans the possibility of a tacky sort of transcendence, a way to take part in consumer culture without being part of it. Others saw the creature as a modern example of the archetypical Green Man. In his book *Where Bigfoot Walks*, naturalist Robert Michael Pyle made the connection explicit: "If Sasquatch is not Pan, Puck, Silenus, Dionysus, Enkidu of *Gilgamesh*, and Robin Goodfellow… then they are damned close. For what are any of these characters but embodiments of nature, the earth, and all that is green and contrary to control?" (155). In a poem by Margaret Atwood, Sasquatch had green flesh; "the leaves," it said, "are my ears" (15). The Bigfoot in a poem by another poet, Harry Humes, had a throat with "mountain fog in it and canyons and switchback ridges." The creature was "the mountain and its hidden lake or first light finding a lonely place" (27–28). In Hoagland's *Seven Rivers West*, Bigfoot was an incarnation of the American frontier. The beast was compared to the mountains, Native Americans, bears, moose, Eskimos, and ghosts (90, 105, 121, 209, 238, 260, 296).

This Bigfoot, as Pyle said, was an "an ambassador for a truly green spirituality," a symbol of the environmental movement, and its message was—escape (157). Escape now. Leave the plastic world of consumerism for a more authentic place. Sasquatches "lure us into the wilderness," said nature writer David Rains Wallace in his book *The Klamath Knot* (138). Maps proclaimed wilderness areas of northern California "Bigfoot Country" and in the mid-1970s the Sierra Club published a hiking guide to the region, which encouraged nature-lovers to head into the forest looking for Bigfoot (Hart 43–45; "Map to Include 'Bigfoot Country'" 12:1). This was a rather more literal case of camping with Bigfoot.

The escape that Bigfoot offered was perhaps best captured by a quirky political movement. In 1975, author Ernest Callenbach published *Ecotopia*, in which he imagined Oregon, Washington, and Northern California seceding from the United States and building an ecological paradise. Since that time, talk of an independent nation—often called Cascadia—was bandied about, the borders variously stretching or shrinking, sometimes including British Columbia as well as Callenbach's Ecotopia, sometimes dropping California

altogether. Small political movements were born to advance the separatist dream, and died. In 1998, humorist Lyle Zapato, a resident of the Cascadia region, created a website in part devoted to agitating for an independent Cascadia. A Sasquatch Militia defended Zapato's Cascadia. Bigfoot was the creature that made possible a middle-class escape from the contemporary world, like the angel placed at the gate to Eden, protecting paradise (Woodward L1).

In these middle-class fantasies, the paradise that Bigfoot guarded was a place where leisure was valued over work: where walkers and hikers and backpackers knew the world better, survived the world better than those who worked in it, those who felled trees or hunted game or fished rivers, where leisurely weeks could be spent thanks to the largesse of a grant (White 171–85). The workweek in Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* was short, for instance, allowing plenty of time for recreation (20). And the garden was seemingly free of consumerism. The titular character in Paul Doyle's novel, *Nioka, Bride of Bigfoot*, for example, left civilization and had to unlearn consumerism—"the biggest cult of all and the craziest" (188). Robert Michael Pyle decried "the tabloidization of the world" and "the general spread of dross in the mass culture today." He wrote,

> Examples abound: television almost *in toto*. Wal-Marts and malls instead of vital town centers. Vocabulary's decline. Bestseller lists. Lite music, food, and beer—oxymorons all. And architecture: I recently saw a historic photograph of a magnificent hotel, the Louvre, that once stood in Astoria, Oregon. On its site now stands a McDonald's. The barbarians are not at the gates; they're well inside. (160)

Reviewing the Sixtyseven Gallery's art exhibit "Sasquatch Society," the *New York Times*'s critic Ken Johnson suggested that Bigfoot represented "the dream of an all-natural authenticity, which, for all their ironic sophistication, people immersed in the artificial junk of consumer society long for" (26).

Like deep-sea fish that cannot be brought to the surface without collapsing, the Sasquatches of Hoagland's *Seven Rivers West* by definition could not exist in a consumer society. One of the characters, Cecil, became obsessed with catching a Bigfoot to display, but worried that the task was impossible: "What a crazy errand—to hope to grab and transport such an apparition East"; and, indeed, when he returned

home without one, he knew "he would have no proof even within his own mind that these creatures had ever existed" (259, 315). Cecil's traveling partner, Sutton, tried the opposite: to bring the consumerism to Bigfoot, and found such frivolity could not survive on the frontier. His knack was jumping into shallow bodies of water from towering heights. When he performed his feat for a group of whites, they were so amazed that they funded Sutton and Cecil's journey; later, and farther into the wilderness, the trick left an audience of Native Americans confused and scared. When Sutton tried to impress a troop of Sasquatches with his circus act, he died: the frontier was a hard place, intolerant of the frivolous (61, 220, 303). The novel suggested, however, that Sutton would not be the last to bring such silliness to the West, nor Cecil the last to try to despoil it. As they traveled, Cecil and Sutton were continually updated on the progress of the transcontinental railroad. Sasquatches, Hoagland implied, had once been real but were no longer because civilization had killed them.

Iron John

In 1987, Ron Carlson published two short stories featuring Sasquatch. "Bigfoot Stole my Wife" seemed to be about a pathetic man who chose to believe in bizarre things rather than confront his own failures. He returned from gambling to find his wife gone, her things missing, her car and dog also gone. This should have come as no surprise: she had threatened to leave before because he constantly ignored her and spent all of his time at the track. But the narrator insisted that she had not left him. Rather, Bigfoot had kidnapped her ("Bigfoot Stole My Wife" 57–61). It was obvious self-deception —until the next story. In "I am Bigfoot," Sasquatch spoke. He is real, he affirmed, and he does steal women, or, more accurately, he calls them away. "And when I call a woman, she comes," he quipped. They come with him because their husbands ignore them, because they are bored, and because he knew what makes them happy, understood their secret desires and could fulfill them ("I Am Bigfoot" 62–63).

Carlson's Bigfoot was different from the campy Bigfoot, which was all about exteriors, and the Green Man, who encouraged running away. His Bigfoot suggested that what was needed was a turning

inward, not an escape but a retreat from the world. Become a better, stronger man, he warned, or risk losing what you have. This image of Bigfoot as a wise (if lecherous) counselor appeared throughout the 1980s—Carlson's stories were published in *Harper's*, anthologized and adapted to the stage (Goodman C26:1); George Lucas's movie franchise *Star Wars* presented a Bigfoot-like creature in this way. So did "Harry and the Hendersons."

The Bigfoot in "Harry and the Hendersons" was the wise mentor to the story's main character, George Henderson, teaching him how to love and love appropriately. Harry taught George that he did not need to win his father's approval by demonstrating his hunting prowess—an atavistic kind of masculinity, unsuited to *fin de siecle* American middle class—and that he should, instead, follow his bliss and become an artist (Kimmel 322–24; Lattin 5). In the process, George found a new father figure, an elderly Bigfoot hunter who appreciated him; he also improved his relationship with his own son, Ernie, realizing that he was doing to Ernie what his father had done to him, forcing him to be something that he was not. This story line was common throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Luke Skywalker learned to love his father with the help of wild men—the green man Yoda, the Sasquatch-like Wookies and Ewoks, for example (Galipeau 237).

There are obvious affinities between this Bigfoot and the id of Freudian psychology, as well as its more upbeat off-shoot, Jungian psychology. Both of those psychological theories described an interior wilderness—the subconscious—inhabited by a libidinal, orectic wildman, in Freudian theory, or a creative, wondrous one, in Jungian psychology. Indeed, Lucas was influenced by Jungian theories via the mythologist Joseph Campbell (Salewicz 46–47). So was Robert Bly, who, in 1990 rewrote a fairy tale collected by the Grimm brothers (Zipes 3–19; Schwalbe 35–46). The wildman of that tale—the titular Iron John, a Bigfoot-like creature, if not exactly Sasquatch—became the centerpiece of the mythopoetic men's movement and another counselor of men.

Bly's story was about a prince who pledged his service to a king, freed himself from his mother, married, suffered wounds but also won a true and honest life. Iron John mentored the prince in his quest. Bly contended that every man had an Iron John—a hairy wildman—buried deep in his psyche. The wildman was a wise tutor—sometimes Bly suggested that the wildman could be an actual mentor, not just a part

of the unconscious—who knew the secrets to becoming a true man. Like Carlson's Bigfoot, Iron John taught men to be lovers and also to be strong, strong enough to believe in something.

These middle-class Bigfoot stories, as much as camp appropriations and environmental celebrations of Bigfoot, were responses to consumerism, although less obviously so. The cuckolded husband in Carlson's "Bigfoot Stole my Wife" insisted that the problem was not with him but a culture that made belief impossible—and there were indications that it was specifically consumer culture (61). Consumer culture has bequeathed to the world tabloids, one of Bigfoot's modern homes, and these despoiled beliefs, making it seem chintzy rather than precious. George Henderson gave up not only hunting but also a career selling sporting goods because the job of enticing consumers forced him to mis-use his talent, drawing a wanted poster for Bigfoot that showed a hideous monster rather than the gentle creature that Harry actually was.

Bly feared that the Industrial Revolution had ruined American manhood (*Iron John: A Book About Men* 92–102). In centuries past, boys were made men through close contact with their fathers; in the twentieth century, men left for work and boys were left adrift, coming to see the world through their mother's eyes, to view their fathers with skepticism and disdain. They became soft, passive, and confused. Although Bly did not spell it out, his argument in *Iron John*—and his later book *The Sibling Society*—made clear that these were exactly the sort of men who could be manipulated by advertising, turned into mindless consumers (*The Sibling Society* 27, 81). These were men who needed Sasquatch mentors.

And, apparently, many American men of Bly's generation agreed with him. He and his stories were sensations. He led retreats into the woods, where middle-class men could dance and cry and read poetry and come in contact with their inner wildman. His hair white and bushy, Bly sometimes seemed to be the wildman himself. The retreats first caught the attention of PBS—that most middle-class of television stations—and then the media at large. A movement grew, the mythopoetic men's movement, so named because middle-class American men involved with it tried to understand their historical and social position by reading and interpreting fables (Kimmel 316–22). (Other men's movements also emerged at this time, often borrowing from Bly, but their ideas were not always as subtle as his; not infrequently, the other

movements called for a return to the old styles of masculinity, to the culture of character (Messner 397–408; Edmundson 94–101).) *Iron John: A Book about Men* spent 62 weeks on the *New York Times* best-seller list (Kakutani C1:3). The number of wildmen retreats expanded, thousands of men heading into the woods—looking for Bigfoot, or something like him.

Running with the Wolves

Some middle-class women writers were also drawn to Bigfoot, for reasons not so different than those that attracted men involved with the mythopoetic movement. By the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s, feminism had fragmented; there were still politically engaged women fighting for equal rights, equal opportunities, equal pay, affordable childcare, and better healthcare, but, increasingly, feminism seemed to be less a matter of political actions. Rather, like camp, environmentalism, and other counterculture movements, feminism seemed only another variety of consumerism: liberation was achieved by purchasing the right cigarette, the right deodorant (Bolotin 28–31; Brooks 2–12; Rosen 274–76). Middle-class women had long been seen as defenders of communal values, of the family, of spaces in society—the home, civic and voluntary organizations—that were free from market values. But now that was no longer true, as women entered the work force and feminism became bound up with consumerism (Rosen 308–14, 28–30).

And so many women, looking for a reprieve from consumerism, turned away from feminism and the public sphere and to the private one: the home, the family, the self, the soul (Ehrenreich 213–23; Rosen 314–20). In 1981, Betty Friedan—Godmother of the feminist movement—published *The Second Stage*, announcing that most of the feminist movement's goals had been met, or were well on their way to being met, and urging feminists to return to their families, to expend their energies in the home. Self-help books flourished. Like the middle-class men of the mythopoetic movement, post-feminists were looking to repair the hidden wounds caused by life in American society, to refresh themselves. The writers Kit Reed, Molly Gloss, Francine Prose, Karen Marie Christa Minns, and Clarissa Pinkola Estes looked to Bigfoot as a guide to what Bly had called "soul work"

(Bly, *Iron John* 137). Allyson Mitchell's art was a conscious criticism of this turn toward self-help therapeutics (Lichtman 22–23).

In Francine Prose's *Bigfoot Dreams*, Sasquatch represented all the hidden, dark, and embarrassing desires of the story's heroine, Vera: her desire to smoke when she knew she shouldn't, to escape from her daughter's ballet recital when the little girl broke down crying, and to knit together her family—best friend, parents, daughter, estranged husband Lowell—with a bond stronger than love. A tabloid writer, Vera associated these wishes with the false faith of those who read tabloids, a working-class naiveté. Over the course of the story, though, she learned that such desires were not always false: miracles do happen. Women do need men, need family: she needed Lowell; her friend, Louise, a refugee from the 1960s whose wackiness Vera encouraged, needed a man to protect her from herself. When Vera was fired from her job and freed to write whatever story she wanted, she rejected the suggestion of her father—an old communist who had fought with the Lincoln Brigade—that she write about class struggle and chose instead to write about people who spend their lives chasing mythical animals, finding them no longer victims of delusion but owners of an important insight: it is hope that allows families to come together and stay together. The heroine in Molly Gloss's *Wild Life* underwent a similar transformation. Charlotte was a freethinking woman of the early twentieth century, mother of a family of boys with no need for a man. That changed after she spent weeks in the forest living with a troupe of Sasquatches—getting in touch with herself. "The Wildman of the Woods," Charlotte said, "is but a ghost of the wildman within," and so her confrontation with the Sasquatches was also a confrontation with her own psyche, one that led her to a more fulfilling life (31). The experience also allowed her to bond better with the adult men of her life, to accept them, and understand the importance of family.

Two years after Bly published *Iron John*, the Jungian analyst Clarissa Pinkola Estes released what was in many ways a companion to that book, *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*, which set out in formal, psychological terms the process that Prose and Gloss described in their fiction. To become whole, she argued, to repair the psychic wounds caused by life in modern society, women needed to turn away from the world and nurture their inner beast. "Women's flagging vitality,"

Estes wrote, "can be restored by extensive 'psychic-archeological' digs into the ruins of the female underworld. By these methods we are able to recover the ways of the natural instinctive psyche, and through its personification in the Wild Woman archetype we are able to discern the ways and means of woman's deepest nature" (3–4). *Women Who Run with the Wolves* did not inspire a movement the way that Bly's book did, but it was still extremely popular, spending more than a year on *The New York Times*'s bestseller list (Kakutani C1:3).

Sasquatch for Sale

At the same time Bigfoot offered middle-class Americans a glimpse of a more authentic life, one above or beyond the plastic consumer culture in which they lived, the monster was also a commercial icon peddling baubles and trinkets. Bigfoot appeared in ads for Canadian Club whiskey during the 1970s. In the 1980s, the creature starred in a series of commercials for Kokanee beer. Through the rest of the century and into the next, it hawked pizza and TVs and cell phones and ketchup and McDonald's and Disney and beef jerky and a host of other products (Buhs, chapter 10). And yet, that Bigfoot should simultaneously play the role of mass consumption's opponent and promoter only *seems* a contradiction. Actually, even when Bigfoot most seemed to oppose mass consumption, the monster was, slyly, still selling it.

Far from undercutting traditional categories, camp depictions of Bigfoot reinforced them and made consumer society work—but with a wink, a nod, a knowing sneer that made it seem otherwise (Frank 27–33). The dense web of philosophical, scientific, theological, literary, and theatrical allusions in Tavel's play "Bigfoot" guaranteed that it would be seen and understood only by the educated middle and upper classes: the play did not erase class lines, but reasserted them. Producers of tabloids were well aware that college students collected their publications as examples of camp and actively designed the rags for them: the students were just another species of consumer (Sloan 172–92). *The Simpsons* Sasquatch episode was watched by more people than programs on two of the three other networks (Gerard C18). In nine months, Fox, the network which aired the show, sold licensing

rights to 52 marketers (Grimm 17). Stores set up *Simpsons* boutiques, selling T-shirts, dolls, a whole host of things to people who wanted to rebel through consumption.

"Lady Sasquatch" was supposed to be a celebration of female sexuality. But reversing the polarity of meanings—making the positive negative, the negative positive—did not threaten the status quo (Haraway 161–62). Mitchell's wildwomen were still, as she admitted, "eye candy" (qtd. in Jennifer O'Connor 22); there was still room for sexism, because Mitchell's work insisted that there was an inviolable inner wild woman; and whatever made women essentially different from men could be cause for discrimination. "Lady Sasquatch" was also supposed to challenge consumerism. But to view art is to consume—and to view art in modern society is to be a part of consumer culture. Mitchell recognized that, and tried to neutralize it, giving Lady Sasquatch "agency" by enlarging the *Playboy* cartoons, removing the men from the pictures, and using a material that could be touched (Jennifer O'Connor 23). (Unlike most artists, Mitchell encouraged gallery attendees to touch the work.) "Yes, we are consuming them, or enjoying them or objectifying them," she admitted, "but there's a difference in the way they're being looked at, I like to think" (qtd. in Jennifer O'Connor 23). Even if there was a difference, though, it didn't amount to much of an attack on consumption. Her images were repeatedly described as cute, as fun—hardly the words associated with the birth of a new social movement.

Environmentalism, too, was not an escape from consumerism as much as an escape to certain *kinds* of consumerism—kinds that, like camp, affirmed the elite status of the middle-class consumer. To walk *Where Bigfoot Walks*, for example, Pyle spent hundreds of dollars on shoes and, like so many who want to get away from it all, plenty of money on GoreTex and tents and backpacks: items that are valued by the middle class because they seem counter to consumerism but are consumer products just the same. Historian Samuel Hays has argued that environmentalism grew out of the same post-World War II changes in the American economy and society that allowed for the creation of a consumer society. The huge increase in wages that came after the war made it possible for Americans to spend money on "quality of life" goods. Americans wanted clean air, fresh water, and green places where they could play: leisure time, the pursuit of happiness, also part of what came to be defined as the good life (Hays 2–5;

Frank 29–31). Nature increasingly became a consumer good and environmentalism was a middle-class form of consumerism: nature was something else that could be used to craft a personality, to develop the self. Sasquatch, Atwood wrote in her poem, "can never be known: he can teach you only about yourself" (20).

A similar argument can be made about the turning of middle-class men and women to their inner Bigfoot. The retreats reflected genuine emotion, there is no doubt, but they were not challenges to the organization of American society, as Bly, in hyperbolic moments, claimed. They were ways for middle-class Americans to have it all. Post-feminists accepted the gains that the women's movement had wrought but wanted to disassociate themselves from it (Rosen 274). Bly and others in the mythopoetic movement wanted a world in which men were allowed to openly cry, to grieve, but not one in which the social structures that empowered men (and limited their emotional expressivity) were altered (Schwalbe 142–84; Kimmel 318–21). Soul work, wildman retreats, and confrontations with wild-women were ways of accommodating the middle-class to the changing American culture: healing wounds not by fixing what caused them—not by actually resisting consumerism—but with positive thinking. "A woman cannot make the culture more aware by saying 'Change,'" Estes wrote. "But she can change her own attitude toward herself… (which) begins to change attitudes in the culture" (204). Believing was a courageous act, just as the narrator in "Bigfoot Stole my Wife" insisted.

The Bourgeois Bigfoot existed at the heart of what historian Ian McKay calls "the cultural contradictions of late capitalism" (278). As mass consumption continued, as ever more parts of the world were commodified and sold, as those enmeshed in this consumer society became increasingly anxious that the world in which they lived was not real, they sought out the true; and Bigfoot seemed to embody the authentic: the monster was wild, hairy, in touch with the fundamental forces of nature, unblemished by modern society. But the creature could not, in the end, live up to its promise, for the only way to encounter it was through mass culture: this was the cultural contradiction of which McKay spoke, that authenticity itself becomes a commodity. Bigfoot was a creation of mass consumerism and was consumed, like any other product, used not to resist mass consumption but to create an identity within that culture. These images of

Bigfoot—"Lady Sasquatch," Iron John, the green man, all of the middle-class versions of the monster—were not powerful enough to break the foundations of the world; these Sasquatches were creatures that fit into the existing social order. The meanings associated with the monster could be shuffled and reshuffled, but they could not be formed into a miracle, could not answer the question of how to escape—how to resist—the petty tyrannies of everyday life. All roads that Bigfoot walked down led back to the same place.

Works Cited

Atwood, Margaret. "Oratorio for Sasquatch, Man, and Two Androids." *Poems for Voices*. Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1970. 14–28. Print.

Bird, S. Elizabeth. *For Enquiring Minds: A Cultural History of Supermarket Tabloids*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1992. Print.

Bly, Robert. *Iron John: A Book About Men.* 1990. New York: Vintage, 1992. Print.

——. *The Sibling Society*. New York: Vintage, 1997. Print.

Bolotin, Susan. "Voices from the Post-Feminist Generation," *New York Times Magazine* 7 Oct. 1982: 28–31. Print.

Bottoms, Stephen J. *Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off-Broadway Movement*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2004. Print.

Brooks, Ann. *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms*. New York: Routledge, 1997. Print.

Buhs, Joshua Blu. *Bigfoot: The Life and Times of a Legend*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009. Print.

Callenbach, Ernest. *Ecotopia*. 1975. New York: Bantam, 1990. Print.

Carlson, Ron. "Bigfoot Stole My Wife." *Dreamers and Desperadoes: Contemporary Short Fiction of the American West*. Eds. Craig Lesley and Katheryn Stavrakis. New York: Laurel, 1993a. 57–61. Print.

——. "I Am Bigfoot." *Dreamers and Desperadoes: Contemporary Short Fiction of the American West*. Eds. Craig Lesley and Katheryn Stavrakis. New York: Laurel, 1993b. 62–63. Print.

Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Vintage, 2003. Print.

Doyle, Paul. *Nioka, Bride of Bigfoot: A Novel*. Seattle: Daily Planet Press, 1992. Print.

Edmundson, Mark. *Nightmare on Elm Street: Angels, Sadomasochism, and the Culture of Gothic*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997. Print.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class*. New York: Perennial, 1990. Print.

Estes, Clarissa Pinkola. *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*. 1992. New York: Ballantine, 1994. Print.

Frank, Thomas. *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997. Print.

Freeman, Joshua. "Hardhats: Construction Workers, Manliness, and the 1970 Pro-War Demonstrations." *Journal of Social History* 26 (1993): 725–45. Print.

Friedan, Betty. *The Second Stage*. New York: Summit, 1981. Print.

Fussell, Paul. *Class: A Painfully Accurate Guide Through the American Status System*. New York: Ballantine, 1983. Print.

Galipeau, Steven A. *The Journey of Luke Skywalker: An Analysis of Modern Myth and Symbol*. Peru, IL: Open Court, 2001. Print.

Gerard, Jeremy. "Bad Language, Hurt Feelings and Success," *New York Times* 21 Feb. 1990: C18. Print.

Gloss, Molly. *Wild Life*. New York: Mariner, 2001. Print.

Goodman, Walter. "Bigfoot Stole My Wife." Rev of "Bigfoot Stole my Wife," by Ron Carlson. New York Times 10 June 1987: C26. Print.

Grimm, Matthew. "A Smash Cartoon Hit Called 'The Simpsons' Hits Licensing Paydirt." *Adweek* 5 March 1990: 17. Print.

Haraway, Donna J. *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. New York: Routledge, 1989. Print.

Hart, John. *Hiking the Bigfoot Country*. San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1975. Print.

Hays, Samuel P. *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955–1985*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987. Print.

Hoagland, Edward. *Seven Rivers West*. New York: Summit, 1986. Print.

Horowitz, Daniel. *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939–1979*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2004. Print.

Humes, Harry. "The Christian Woman and Sasquatch." *Ridge Music*. Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 1987. 27–28. Print.

Johnson, Ken. "Sightings of an Elusive Mountain Creature," *New York Times* 26 Aug. 2005: 26. Print.

Kakutani, Michiko. "Beyond Iron John? How About Iron Jane?," *New York Times* 27 Aug. 1993: C1. Print.

Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: Free Press, 1996. Print.

Lamont, Michele. *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2000. Print.

Larson, Gary. *The Complete Far Side 1980–1994*. Riverside, NJ: Andrews McMeel, 2003. Print.

Lattin, Don. *Following Our Bliss: How the Spiritual Ideals of the Sixties Shape Our Lives Today*. San Francisco: Harper, 2004. Print.

Lichtman, Chelsey. "Deeply Lez." *Trade: Queer Things* Winter 5 (2004): 21–23. Print.

"Map to Include 'Bigfoot Country.'" *Humboldt Times* 28 October 1958: 12. Print.

Marranca, Bonnie, and Dasgupta, Gautam (eds.). *Theatre of the Ridiculous*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998. Print.

McKay, Ian. *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Novia Scotia*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1994. Print.

Messner, Michael. "Essentialist Retreats: The Mythopoetic Men's Movement and the Christian Promise Keepers." *Men and Masculinity*. Ed. Theodore F. Cohen. New York: Wadsworth, 2001. 397–408. Print.

Meyer, Moe (ed.). *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.

Minns, Karen Marie Christa. *Calling Rain*. Tallahassee, FL: Naiad, 1991. Print.

Morton, Alan. *The Complete Directory to Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Television Series: A Comprehensive Guide to the First Fifty Years, 1946–1996*. Peoria, IL: Other World Books, 1997. Print.

O'Connor, Jennifer. "Eye Candy: Fluffy Feminist Confections." *XTRA: Toronto's Gay Lesbian Weekly* 22 Jan. 2004: 22–23. Print.

O'Connor, John J. "Prime-Time Cartoon of Beautiful People." *New York Times* 21 Feb. 1990: C18. Print.

Parfrey, Adam, Ed. *It's a Man's World: Men's Adventure Magazines, the Postwar Pulps*. Los Angeles: Feral House, 2003. Print.

Pendergast, Tom. *Creating the Modern Man: American Magazines and Consumer Culture, 1900–1950*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2000. Print.

Prose, Francine. *Bigfoot Dreams*. New York: Pantheon, 1986. Print.

Pyle, Robert Michael. *Where Bigfoot Walks: Crossing the Dark Divide*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995. Print.

Reckitt, Helena. "My Fuzzy Valentine: Allyson Mitchell." *C: International Contemporary Art* 89 (2006): 14–17. Print.

Reed, Kit. "The Bride of Bigfoot." *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* 8 July (1984): 57–65. Print.

Rosen, Ruth. *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*. New York: Penguin, 2001. Print.

Ross, Andrew. *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*. London: Routledge, 1989. Print.

Rubin, Lillian Breslow. *Worlds of Pain: Life in the Working Class Family*. New York: Basic Books, 1976. Print.

Salewicz, Chris. *George Lucas: The Making of His Movies*. New York: Thunder's Mouth, 1999. Print.

Sanderson, Ivan T. *Abominable Snowmen: Legend Come to Life*. Philadelphia: Chilton, 1961. Print.

Schwalbe, Michael. *Unlocking the Iron Cage: The Men's Movement, Gender Politics, and American Culture*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996. Print.

Sloan, Bill. *"I Watched a Wild Hog Eat My Baby!": A Colorful History of Tabloids and Their Cultural Impact*. New York: Prometheus, 2001. Print.

Smith, Erin A. *Hard-Boiled: Working-Class Readers and Pulp Magazines*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2000. Print.

Smith, Michael Townsend. "'Bigfoot' Journal." *Michael Townsend Smith*. (1972) 22 July 2008. Web. 26 Dec. 2012.

Sontag, Susan. "Notes on 'Camp.'" *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1967. 275–92. Print.

Susman, Warren I. "'Personality' and the Making of Twentieth-Century Culture." *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Pantheon, 1984. 271–86. Print.

Tavel, Ronald. "Bigfoot." Ronald Tavel papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI, 1970. Print.

Temple, Kevin. "Sexing the Sasquatch." *Now: Everything Toronto* 25 (2005): 15–21 Sept. 2005. Print.

"The Hot I Baltimore Shares Obie Award with River Niger." *New York Times* 23 May 1973: 36:5. Print.

Wallace, David Rains. *The Klamath Knot: Explorations of Myth and Evolution*. 1983. Berkeley: U of California P, 2003. Print.

"Weekend Box Office." *Los Angeles Times* 9 June 1987: 2. Print.

White, Richard. "'Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?': Work and Nature." *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. Ed. William Cronon. New York: Norton, 1996. 171–85. Print.

Woodward, Steve. "Welcome to Cascadia," *Oregonian* 14 Nov. 2004: L01. Print.

Zipes, Jack. "Spreading Myths About Fairy Tales: A Critical Commentary on Robert Bly's *Iron John*," *New German Critique* 55, (1992): 3–19. Print.

Joshua Blu Buhs, an independent scholar, is author of *The Fire Ant Wars* (Chicago, 2004) and *Bigfoot* (Chicago, 2009). He is currently at work on a history of the Forteans.